

COMMUNICATING CHRIST

THROUGH HINDU RELIGION



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FOREWORD

The title of the book **"Communicating Christ Through Hindu Religion"** goes with a question to Christian community whether this is possible. This book and many other Research Scholars who searched the Indian (Hindu) scriptures shall say 'yes'. The history along with the spiritual growth of this great country India started from the day of the arrival of St. Thomas to this country in 49 A.D.

Authentic evangelism sees people through the eyes of Jesus. Jesus Christ, the incarnation of the awesomely holy God unconditionally loved humanity, even in its sinful state. He reached out to those who were labeled as "sinners" by the society and marginalized by the political and religious power structures of his time.

How do we see the "other"? In Athens (Acts 17:16-34), while Paul was deeply disturbed and pained at the idolatry of the city, he did not fail to love them, nor did he speak derogatively about them. Rather, he could find something positive even in that ("You are so religious that you have an altar even to the unknown God") so that he could connect with his audience. He did not dilute the gospel nor did he hide the fact that they must abandon their idolatry and turn to the Living God, but he did so with love and respect.

Authentic evangelism is possible only when we understand the socio-cultural and religious context of the receptor and communicate meaningfully the gospel with them. Sadhu Sunder Singh gave a succinct description of what contextualization in the Indian context is. He said, "It is giving the water of life in Indian Cup." There are atleast 4693 cups within India that need the water of life.

Paul in Athens, engaged his audience by employing their own poets and philosophers' sayings to clarify his message, and highlighting a component of their worship ritual (altar of the unknown God) as a redemptive analogy, and also by using the historical styles that were in line with the Greek tradition. An interesting study in contextual communication of the gospel can be done by analyzing Paul's philosophically inclined Greeks in Athens (Acts 17:16-34).

The call for contextualization reverberates even within the corporate world. In her highly influential *We Are Like That Only*, Indian author Rama Bijapurkar claims that many of the multinational companies who entered post-liberalization India failed because they did not contextualize their strategies according to the Indian situation.

In Athens, Paul was able to connect with his audience and communicate contextually because he was a good observer and learner, as he "walked around and looked carefully at their objects of worship" (Acts 17:23). King Solomon, known for his wisdom was also an avid learner (Proverbs 24:30-34), as he writes; "I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw" (24:32).

But the missionary work started with St. Thomas in India and being continued right at the moment has contributed enormously for humanizing and elevating the people of 'Hindustan'. We may conclude that "A virgin soil is now for the first time being ploughed... and in process of time we may reasonably expect to reap a rich crop of intellectual and moral results, Christianized Indians" and Christian India. Yes, a secular India that espouses and lives the Christ's gospel of love and peace and equality and justice.

From National Institute of Leadership Training yet another compact hand book affirms how Christian doctrines are embedded in the Hindu Religion.

I join with my colleagues in NILT in praising the Lord Jesus, for bringing this small book to throw light on reaching the Hindu Brothers of this spiritual great country and group India, under "One Flock One Shepherd".

G.J. Pandithurai

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INTRODUCTION

It was India Missions Association which had organized the 'Bhandu Seva Conference' at Nagpur between February 21 - 24, 2013, is responsible for having chosen the topic 'Communicating Christ through Indian Religion' as the participants to this conference were from various Missionary organizations who are toiling night and day to reach out to the Hindus, i.e. our 'bhandus' so that they shall taste the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ and shall see the wonderful 'light of the world'.

✓ (I felt it would be of great help to the resource persons and the participants of this conference if they know about the historical background with which the popular Hindu Religion got developed in the Indian soil after the advent of Apostle Thomas. The Christian Missionaries, though not all, still believe that Hindu religion was developed through very many factors of the Aryan Vedas, Brahmanas, Sastras and their methods of worship and beliefs. They also think that Hindu religion was followed and practiced by our people of India for over a period of several thousands of years before Christ. This is not true because it lacks historical evidences.

The name Hinduism was coined only in 1794 AD by Sir William Jones. Contrary to the fact that Hinduism is the other name for Hindutwa, a way of life, that every human being is not socially equal by birth whereas Hindu Religion is propagating the humane love and spirituality which got developed after assimilating the universal love of God propagated by Apostle Thomas right from 49 AD in Taxila in north and from 52 AD to 72 AD in the south, ie, in Tamil Nadu.)

Unless the missionaries understand this historical background the love of Christ Jesus cannot be meaningfully served to the 'bhandus' of our great nation. We don't preach Christianity so that they would be converted to the Christian religion. We don't demolish their culture and integration of India. But we do want to preach the

love of Jesus Christ and his salvation so that our people shall be liberated from the clutches of sin, casteism, slavery to the bad habits of black magic and all sorts of Satanic powers and one day we will achieve 'one nation one people' as was envisaged by Thirumoolar :

'Onrae Kulam, Oruvanae Devan'

The second topic 'Doctrine of Avatar and Vyuha' is included in this book to have an understanding about how any human being or any cult-worship could be deified as an avatar. The very meaning of the word avatar is the process of coming down, that is, coming down from heaven and not going up ; avatar is not the process of making any mortal being as the supreme God. This vyuha has paved the way for idolotary which had strengthened a section of the people as the priestly class and the rest as the lower strata of the society or untouchables. Words may not be suffice to express my gratitude to National Institute of Leadership Training and to my colleagues in NILT who are instrumental in bring out this book. May God bless India with his power of salvation.

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EARLY THOMAS CHRISTIANITY IN INDIA

INTRODUCTION

It is the common man's understanding that the advent of the Europeans in the 15th C.A.D. commensurate with the arrival of Christianity in India. But the renowned scholars have recorded that the gospel of Jesus Christ had been sown in the Indian soil in the very inception of the Christ Era. As of today many a scholar, secular as well as Christian, from India and from abroad have written with substantial evidences, historical accounts and proofs to show that the above statement is a reality.

Jawaharlal Nehru in his 'Glimpses of World History' writes as follows;

"You may be surprised to learn Christianity came to India long before it went to England and or Western Europe, and when even in Rome it was a despised and prescribed sect - within hundred years or so of the death of Jesus, Christian Missionaries came to South India by sea. They were received courteously and permitted to preach their new faith. They converted a large number of people, and their descendants have lived there, with varying fortunes, to this day. Most of them belong to old Christian sects, which have ceased to exist in Europe"¹

The above historical perspective of Nehru was attested by the Indian Philosopher S. Radhakrishnan as,

"Christianity has flourished in India from the beginning of the Christian era. The Syrian Christians of Malabar believe that their form of Christianity is Apostolic derived directly from the Apostle Thomas. They contend that their version of Christian faith is distinctive and independent of the forms established by St. Peter and St. Paul in the West. What is obvious is that there have been Christians in the West Coast of India from very early times. They were treated with great respect by the Hindus, whose princes built for them Churches"².

It is said here, "the Roman Breviary states that St. Thomas preached the Christian truth to the Parthians, Medes, Persians, Hyrcanians and Bactrians that finally he taking to himself to the Indians, he instructed them in the Christian religion and that he died martyr at Calamina (i.e. Mylapore)".³

Marco Polo (1293 A.D.) has written about the ministry of St. Thomas in his travel document. Yule has said, 'that the tradition of St. Thomas preaching in India is very old, so old that it probably is, in its simple form, true.'⁴

Authors have suggested the possible route of St. Thomas the Apostle to India. Dr. Farquahar gives a probable route :

"Apostle St. Thomas, one of the 12 disciples of Jesus sailed from Alexandria to the Indus and reached the Kings capital 'Taxila' (Presently known as Punjab) about A.D. 48-49. He left Taxila when the Punjab and its capital were seized by the 'Indo - Seythian Kushans' from China about A.D. 50 and went from there to 'Muziri' (Presently known as Kodungallur in Kerala) on the Malabar coast via Socotra reaching Muziri in A.D. 51-52."⁵

The above are a few references out of a hoard of materials available in support of the spread of Christianity in India by Apostle Thomas in the very first century of our Lord.

If it is true, what was the fate of early Indian Christianity. Has it undergone an unceremonial burial in the milieu of political upheavals, foreign invasions, religious intolerance and conspiracy etc.? This paper attempts to investigate into some reliable factors to show a bird's eye-view about the Early Christianity in India. For this, we need to understand the religious background in India before CE.

INDIAN RELIGIONS IN BC

Jainism and Buddhism were the two major religions founded in India and were propagated throughout the length and breadth of India. Jains claim that Jainism existed long before Mahavira was born and Mahavira reformed Jainism and gave it more exposure. He was

the 24th and last Tirthankara and lived around 6c. B.C. Buddhism was a contemporaneous religion with Jainism and the Buddha who was born around 566 B.C. and after his enlightenment he preached his findings. These were the two major atheistic religions founded and propagated in India. No other theistic religions were founded and practiced in India till the dawn of the CE. Then, how do we account for Hinduism ?

HINDUISM

In the preliminary context it is to be admitted that Hinduism or Hindu religion is a misnomer. 'Hindu', as such, is not a religious term and it is more of a territorial name. The name India derived from the name of the river 'Sind'.

"The Greeks talked of the Indus and Indians. In Hebrew it is 'hoddu'. The Aramaic is 'hendu'. The Syriac is 'Hendo'. In Latin it is India... Hindu names reaching the West generally drop the 's' and substitute 'h' in Persian mouth. The Persians softened the initial 's' to 'h'. Thus the Avesta word is Hindu.... The word reached Greece through Persia. So 'Sindhu' became 'hindu' in Persian writings."⁶

The territorial name 'hindu' was very conveniently used by Sir William Jones, the former Supreme Court Judge of British India in 1794 A.D. to refer to the religion of the people of India as 'Hinduism'. The coinage of the term Hinduism is only 218 years old and we have no records, with the available data, to show that Hinduism was in vogue prior to Sir William Jones.

HINDU RELIGION

The Supreme Court of India, very recently had pronounced a judgement that Hinduism is not a religion but a way of life. It is absolutely true that Hinduism is synonymous with Hindutva, a way of life where people have no social equality. It professes the heirarchy of casteism.

But we know it for sure that what we understand as Hindu faith is Hindu religion which is another name for '*sixfold religion*'.

Saivism, Vaishnavism, Saktam, Gaumaram, Ganapatyam and Sauram are collectively named as 'sixfold religion'. These six religions are grouped into two major heads viz. Saivism and Vaishnavism. These two are presently known by the nomenclature, Hindu religion.

Tamil Bhakti movement which originated in Tamil Nadu in the 6th or 7th centuries had given birth to Saivism and Vaishnavism and the scholars attribute Thirukkural as the propelling force for the origin and development of Tamil Bhakti movement. A.K. Majumdar in his book quotes the following Sanskrit verse :

*"Utpanna Dravida Bhakti
Vriddim Karnatake gata
Kvachit Kvachin Maharastre
Gurjare Pralayam gata*

That is, the cult Bhakti originated in the Dravida country, flourished in Karnataka ; had a sporadic success in Maharashtra and was unsuccessful in Gujarat. It is difficult to assess the value of this statement, but we have seen that popular bhakti cult began in Dravida." ('Dravida', here refers to present Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra and Karnataka states of Southern India.)

The hymns sung by 'Nayanmars' (Saivite Saints) and the Pasurams by Azhwars (Vaishnavite saints) during the period ranging between 5th and 9th centuries are the scriptural songs of Saivism and Vaishnavism. Surprisingly, the scholars assert that the Bhakti movement was not contributed by the four Vedas of the Aryans. If not the Vedas, what could have been the impelling source for the birth of Bhakti marg is a valid and logical question which begs for an answer. A few contemporary scholars have brought out several books, with extensive research scholarship, on Bhakti movement and Early Indian Christianity and they have established a link between India and Palastine.

ST. THOMAS AND INDIA

The traditional stories of the Church associated with Apostle Thomas have been proved to be a historical reality. It is put by Gillbert Slater in the following manner :

*"It was St. Thomas, one of the Chief disciples of Christ, who first brought Christianity to the Malayalam speaking area at a time when the language spoken there was Tamil. Malayalam developed into a separate language only a few centuries later. He came in 52 A.D. in a merchant ship, landed in Kodungaloor Post, and propagated the Christian religion for the first time in India. Afterwards, at several times numerous Christians from Syria immigrated into Malabar, converted local inhabitants and enlarged the Christian Community."*⁸

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru the first Prime Minister and Rajendra Prasad, the first President of free India and other reputed scholars also have attested the arrival of Christianity in the Indian soil in the very first century of our Lord. Nehru has acknowledged that,

*"Both of these (Christianity and Hebrew religion) had probably reached India during the first century after and both had found a place in the country. There were a number of Syrian Christians and Nestorians in South India and they were as much a part of the country as anyone else."*⁹

The First visit of St. Thomas to India is dealt with elaborately with a great deal of historical evidence by James Kurikilankatt in his book "First Voyage of the Apostle Thomas in India". 'Acts of Thomas', an apogryphal literature discovered at Nag Hammdi in 1945 is considered to be an important source which narrates about Apostle Thomas' evangelistic work in Taxila and his association with Gondophares, a great king who had begun to rule in 21 A.D. 'The apostle met the king in the royal palace, which according to the Acts of Thomas was well inside the city walls. The Acts of Thomas mentions about the king of India and the researches now assert that it was Gondophares who ruled over the large area of land beyond the Indus to which the Syrian and Persian writers very often gave the name India or Hindu. J. Charpentier endorses this view in his book. 'St. Thomas the Apostle and India'.¹⁰

The inscription of Takht-i-Bahi dated 46 A.D. makes Gondophares a real contemporary of St. Thomas. And the readings of the coins of Gondophares would ascribe his death in 51 A.D. or

even later. The visit of the apostle in all probability in the same period.¹¹ Kaa. Naa. Subramaniam after an analysis opines that the apostle's first visit to India must be in 49 A.D.

Many books have been attributed to St. Thomas : The Acts of Thomas, Book of Thomas the Contender, Acts of Thomas, Infancy Gospel of Thomas, and Apocalypse of Thomas. All these works are believed to have come from an ascetic, pre-Manichen Christianity of Osthoeene (Eastern Syria between Edessa and Messene).¹² Amongst these, the Acts of Thomas is a very important one. It was transmitted in the Syriac language as well as Greek : for technical reason most specialists hold that Syriac must have been the original language of its composition. In all probability it should have been composed in Edessa sometime between 230 and 250 AD.

MALABAR AND ST. THOMAS

The Malabar tradition puts Apostle Thomas' arrival at Kodungallur (Muziri) in 52 A.D. and his evangelical mission of preaching the gospel commenced with his establishing of seven and a half churches in Tamil Country (Malabar, Chera Nadu of Old Tamil Nadu) Viz. Kodungaloor, Palayur, Parur, Kokkamangalam, Niranam, Kollam, Chayal and Thiruvithankodu (half church) near Kanyakumari. In Malayalam, they are known as 'Aezharaip Palli'.

In Chera Tamil Country of the east coast St. Thomas met with much success and converted a local king who was publicly baptised. The account given by the popular Ramban song, though of a later period, considered representative of most versions, says the apostle landed in Maliankara in 50 A.D. after and a short stay, he went to Mylapore and China. He returned to Mylapore and sailed to Maliankara at the invitation of the king of Thiruvanchikulam, Kodungaloor. In 59 A.D. i.e., in the month of Kannit (Spt. - Act.) ; he was called back to Mylapore via Malayatur and revisited the Churches he had founded during his first missionary expedition. In 69 A.D. he returned to Mylapore via Chayal.¹³

COROMANDAL TRADITION

Apostle Thomas' ministry had lasted for about two decades in Mylapore. Three important places associated with Coromandal tradition are :

- a) Mylapore
- b) Chinnamalai (Little Mount), and
- c) Periya Malai (St. Thomas Mount)

These places are preserved by the Catholic Church to the present day as historically important places of Thomas' mission. Chinnamalai, now is within the limits of Chennai City adjacent to Saidapettai, is reckoned as the place of his deliberation and preaching of the gospel.

Apostle Thomas was pierced with a lance when he was praying before the cross which was carved out by Thomas himself at Periyamalai or St. Thomas Mount. This cross and the painting of Mary with Infant Jesus, believed to have been painted by St. Luke are preserved in the altar of the Church atop 'Calamina' (Persian name for Periyamalai). He was martyred in 72 A.D. and was buried in Mylapore and his sepulture is still there in Santhome Basilica with renovated structure preserved in a serene atmosphere.

According to another version, his remains were exhumed, carried to Edessa, again in the 13th Century exhumed and taken to Ortona in Italy where they are believed to rest today¹⁴ St. Chrysostom (AD 347 - 407), St. Jerome (AD 340 - 420) and Gregory of Tours (AD 540 - 594) also speak of the mission of St. Thomas in India. We shall now go on to look briefly into the impact of the ministry of St. Thomas.

THOMAS CHRISTIANITY IN INDIA

It was discussed in the beginning that Jainism and Buddhism were the two major atheistic religions founded and were preached in India before the advent of Apostle Thomas. Vedism was alien to the land of India and it was in the form of verbal transmission of the Aryans and they professed only the preliminary, under - developed and polytheistic method of worship. They, in fact, according to the

celebrated scholars, were the Aryan worship and not their religion. The oral Vedic mantras were collected and compiled by Vyasa, a Dravidian seer, probably after the 4c A.D. because Vedas are in classical Sanskrit. The first epigraphic evidence to Sanskrit is available only in the 2c A.D.

SANSKRIT

The first evidence of classical Sanskrit is attested by an inscription dating around A.D. 150 in the Brahmi script.¹⁵ It records the repair of a dam originally built by Chandragupta Maurya, and also contains a panegyric in verse which can be regarded as the first literary composition in classical Sanskrit. It is at Girnar in Kathiawar and was inscribed by Rudradamana, the Saka Satrap of Ujjayini, on the same rock on which the fourteen Rock Edicts of Ashoka were also found. 'It is significant that Rudradamana employed classical Sanskrit in a region where about four hundred years before him Ashoka had used only Prakrit. So the absence of Sanskrit in his inscriptions indicates that it did not exist at all that time, as otherwise he would have certainly used it.'¹⁶

The Scriptures of Hindu religion are written in Sanskrit, and epigraphic evidence clearly shows that they could not have been written before A.D. 2nd Century.

ALEXANDER HARRIS FURTHER STATES :

"The bibliographical evidences indicate that the Vedas are written in the Grantha and Nagari scripts, and according to tradition Veda Vyasa, a Dravidian, compiled and wrote Vedas. The Grantha script belongs to the Southern group of scripts and Veda Vyasa being a Dravidian would certainly have used it. Since the earliest evidence of Grantha is only in the 5th c. A.D. the Vedas were written rather late."^{16a}

Hence it is ruled out that the Aryan Vedas had been the source of Hindu religion. Buddhism and Jainism, obviously, could not have given rise to the Tamil Bhakti movement and to the development of

Saivism and Vaishnavism as they are atheistic religions. But in all probability, the only source and propelling force behind Bhakti movement and Tamil religion should have been the apostolic mission of St. Thomas which began in A.D. 49 in Taxila and in AD 52 in Tamil Nadu.

The scriptural literature of Saivism known as 'Paniru Thirumurai' and 'Saiva Siddhanta' and of the Vaishnavism known as 'Naalaayira Thiviyap Prabhandam' are in Tamil language. While the religious scriptures are in Tamil, the Vedanta texts viz. Upanishads, Brahma Sutras and Bhagavad Gita are in Sanskrit. The religion of the Tamils and Vedanta, are the two faces of the same coin that got developed through St. Thomas' evangelism. A brief sketch shall throw more light about the veracity of this statement in the following lines.

CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE ON THIRUKKURAL

Sage Thiruvalluvar is regarded as a contemporary of Apostle Thomas who also lived in Mylapore. The first four chapters of Thirukkural are named as 'Paayiram' (the invocation and an introductory to the content of the book) wherein the Triune God is invoked : God the Father in 'Kadavul Vaazhthu' (I Chapter); God the Holy Spirit in 'Vaan Sirappu' (II Chapter) ; and God the Son in 'Neethaar Perumai' (III Chapter). The one who sacrificed his five senses is termed as 'Ainthaviththaan' (Thirukkural 6, 25) The Sacrifice of God Incarnate is narrated in Thirukkural as follows :

*"Pori Vaayil ainthaviththaan poitheer ozhukka
Neri ninraar needu vaazhvaar"*

*(Those who follow the one, who sacrificed his five senses on an instrument and showed us the way and who is the life and truth will have eternal life).
(Thirukkural, 6)*

Here 'Pori' (instrument) refers to cross because cross or crucifixion was alien to Indian soil.

'Ainthaviththaan' is a word coined by Thiruvalluvar to refer to God and it does not refer to a hermit or a Sanyasin because the

first chapter occurs in 'Kadavul Vaazhthu' (Invocation to God). The Scholars hold that Thirukkural which was composed either in the later part of A.D. 1st Century or in the early part of AD 2nd had given rise to the Bhakti movement which in turn had given rise to Saivism and Vaishnavism.

SAIVISM AND VAISHNAVISM

The above two major religions developed around 7th c. A.D. 'Ceyon', 'Centazhalon', 'Thee vanna' are the names attributed to Siva. They all refer to God who is as red as fire hence the name Sivan. God encountered Moses in the form of fire on Mt. Horeb¹⁷, when Moses went up on the Mt. Sinai to receive ten commandments, it was wrapped in fire and smoke as the Lord had descended upon it.¹⁸ When the people of Israel were led out of captivity from Egypt, God went forth in the pillar of fire during night and in the pillar of cloud during day. 'And God the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there and proclaimed the name of the Lord.'¹⁹ Therefore, Vaishnavites call His name as 'Mega Vanna' (The one whose complexion is like the cloud).

But a new meaning was attributed to 'Sivam' meaning Love, 'Anbe Sivam' (God is Love) and 'Vishnu' (Corrupt form of Tamil Word Vin) meaning 'heaven'. The basic and fundamental doctrine of Vaishnavism is redemption through the incarnation of God. The main purpose of 'avatar' in Vaishnavite mythological expositions is to redeem the world and to protect it from demon and his deceptive means to enslave the mankind so as to keep them ever remain under his evil powers.

The fundamental doctrines are encoded in Saiva Siddhanta in the form of aphorism texts and it speaks about the creation of the universe, the first man and woman and how the fall of the first man and woman had led the whole creation to fall into Sin. Sivagnanabhotham, the theological foundation of Saivism says this as follows :

*"Avan aval athu yennum avai moovinaimaiyin
Thorriya thithiyea odungi malaththulathaam
Antham aathi enmanar pulavar"*

(In the beginning God created man (avan - first man), woman (aval - first woman), and the world (athu) in three different actions and they were holy. But later on they fell into sin (malam) which ended the life of holiness and it was the beginning of sin, thus say the learned.²⁰

The grace of God flourished into the redemptive act of God through His incarnation is elucidated in Sivagnanabhodam that God became a man with five senses - a Guru and he abserved the penence of suffering of death in order to redeem mankind. It is explained as follows:

*"Aimpula vedarin ayarnthanai Valarnthena
Tham muthal Guruvumaai thavaththinil vunarththa vittu
Anniyam inmaiyyin Aran Kazhal selumae"*

(God who came into this world as a Guru on seeing the souls who are living in worldly pleasure by enjoying the pleasure of five senses, made them feel through his penence of suffering of death that they have forgotten their Creator and are living in sin. Once the soul is englightened through his suffering, it repents its sins, and the separation with God is removed and reaches the feet of God.²¹

The salvific-love of God-Incarnate is the foundation and the corner stone of Vaishnavism. It is given in a nutshell in the lines of Nammaazhwar as follows :

*"Poininra gnanamum polla ozhukkum azhukkudambum
Inninra neermai ini yaam uraamai vuyir alippaan
Enninra yoniyumaaip piranthaai Imaiya thalaivaa"*

(God was born from a noble woman in order to give us a new life so that deceptive knowledge, immorality and unclean body would never possess us)²².

The theological doctrines of Saivism and Vaishnavism which were developed during 12th - 14th C AD are immensely attributed to the Christian theology. It is difficult to explain all of them within the scope of this paper. Christian doctrines are also embedded in the tenets of Vedanta.

VEDANTA

Upanishads, Brahmasutras and Bhagavad Gita are the primary texts of 'Prasthan Thraya' of Vedanta. The philosophy of Vedanta puts an end to the Vedic sacrificial worship and hence the name Vedanta - 'anta' = end - putting an end to Vedas. To draw an overall similarity between the Old Testament and Vedic sacrifice and between the New Testament and Vedanta, the former (vedas) is Sacrificial Worship and the later is a religion of the fulfillment of sacrifice. Paul Deussen had brought out an analogy between the two as follows :

"For the Veda falls (as Cankara on Brih P. 4 ff. shows), according to the concept of Vedanta, into two parts, which show a far reaching analogy with Old and New Testaments, a part of works (Karma Kanda), which includes the Mantras and Brahmanas in general and a part of knowledge (Jnana Kanda) which includes the Upanishads and what belongs to them".²³

He further goes on to say,

The work of Badarayana stands to the Upanishads in the same relation as Christian Dogmatics to the New Testament, it investigates the teaching about God, the world, the soul, its conditions of wandering and of deliverance, removes apparent contradictions, binds them systematically together, and is especially concerned to defend them against the attacks of the opponents".²⁴

Brahma Sutras of Badarayana (Vyasa) which explains about the basic doctrines or the philosophical tenets is held to be the essence of the Upanishads in the form of aphorism texts are unintelligible and incomprehensive and therefore this had led the readers to depend upon the commentaries of Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhva for understanding the sutras. The scholars have shown that Sankara's commentaries are unreliable and disloyal to Badarayana and Vedanta.

Brahma Sutras describes God (Brahman) as the Creator - "Janmadyasya Yatah" ([Brahman] is He) from whom (proceed the

creation, etc. of this universe)²⁵ It describes God as a Triune God 'Param'²⁶, 'Pati'²⁷ etc. - they speak about the creative power and transcendence of Almighty. It refers to God as the one who is endowed with human form - 'Rupa Upanyasaat'.²⁸ Brihadaranyaka Upanishad says that God is 'Satya Brahman'²⁹ (Satyam = Truth). According to Brahma Sutras, Brahman is 'Prana Linga'³⁰ (Living Stone). He is 'Prana of Pranas'³¹ (Life). He is immanent - 'Antaryami' - 'Antaryami Yahitai Vatisu'³², He is 'Vaisvanara'³³. (Fire = Holy Spirit) Brahman is 'Nirguna' (Transcendant), Saguna (Incarnate) and 'Antaryami' (Immanent). The Characters attributed to Brahman in Vedanta Sutras are the Characters of Jesus.

The Hindu religion and Vedanta ascribe similar characters and attributives to God (Brahman) and to be precise, He is the God of Trinity. The following Table elucidates this :

Trinity in Indian Religions and Vedanta

Christianity	Thirukkural	Saivism	Vaishnavism	Vedanta	Mahayana Buddhism
God the Father	Kdavul	Param	Paraswarupam	Para Brahman	Dharma Kaya
God the Son	Neeththaar	Aparam	Vibhavam Vyuha Arca	Apara Brahman	Nirmana Kaya
God the Holy Spirit	Vaan	Paraparam	Antaryami	Takara Brahman	Samboga Kaya

The evangelical mission of Apostle Thomas also had its impact on Buddhism which under went a split in the CE and the later division is known as Mahayana, a bigger vehicle, which can accomodate more souls to be liberated. Moreover the Bodhisatva doctrine is very much akin to Jesus himself. Some scholars also have evidenced that the spilit in Jainism as Digambara and Swetambara was due to the impact of Christianity.

CONCLUSION

The advent of Apostle Thomas had brought about a sea change in the Indian religious and philosophical history. The basic doctrines of Hindu religion and Vedanta are nothing but the doctrines of

Christianity. The doctrine of Trinity, the doctrine of avatar, the doctrine of fulfillment of sacrifice, the doctrine of salvation by faith (saranagāti), doctrine of bhakti, negation of cycle of birth, negation of stratified society in the name of caste, and the doctrine of eternal life and eternal death are the basic doctrines on which the whole edifice of Hindu religion (Saivism and Vaishnavism) and Vedanta stand. They were neither contributed by the four Vedas nor were of the biproducts of the Aryan worship. They, without an iota of doubt, are the Christian dogmatics preached by Apostle Thomas. But the mythological writings and expositions over the period had corrupted and distorted the 'Early Thomas Christianity in India.'

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES ON THE HISTORY OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY IN INDIA

First International Conference on the History of Early Christianity in India was conducted at Concordia College, Bronxville, New York between August 13 and 16, 2005 and more than eighty scholars of international repute had presented research papers on Apostle Thomas' mission in India and its impact on Indian thought. At the concluding session of the Conference, the learned participants realised that the scope of research is colossal in scale and a further dwelling on the subject extending to Asia would be enlightening. Subsequent to this the second International Conference was held in Chennai from January 13 to 16, 2007. The research papers presented by the learned international scholars were compiled and released by International Centre for the Study of Christianity in India in 2009.

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF LEADERSHIP TRAINING (NILT)

NILT was founded by a group of Christian friends who have the zeal to propagate the gospel to accomplish the 'Great Commission' of Jesus Christ, to the sons of Indian soil through contextualised methods of evangelism based on the Indian literature, scriptures of Saivism, Vaishnavism, Vedas and Vedanta. They also have developed separate curriculum to be taught in the Bible / Theological Colleges. They also provide crash courses and training programs for the benefit of the evangelists, clergy and the laity based

on Thomas Christianity. NILT has published Fourteen Books, five in Tamil and nine in English, written by Prof. Dr. J.D. BaskaraDoss, Vice President, Curriculum Director of National Institute of Leadership Training and by Dr. Alexander Harris and by Rev. J. Fr. Stacker. Kindly visit our website : www.niltindia.org

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EVANGELIZING THE HINDUS / INDIANS

ADDENDUM TO THE PAPER TITLED : "Early Thomas Christianity in India".

WHAT IS THE AGE OF HINDUISM ?

Hardly 218 years ! The Word 'Hinduism' was coined by Sir William Jones in 1794 AD. No substantial evidence of epigraphy, literary, numismatic evidences etc. to show that it was used previously.

THE WORD 'HINDU' IS A TERRITORIAL NAME

In Persian language the Word 'Sind' was pronounced as 'Hindu'. It has referred to the river Sind and the adjoining region and not the religion.

MAJOR RELIGIONS IN INDIA IN BC

Buddhism and Jainism were the two major religions founded and propagated by Siddhartha Gautama and Mahavira in the 6th Century BC. Buddhism was an agnostic religion and Jainism was an atheistic one. Both these religions never had taught anything about God or any theistic doctrines. Naturally these two religions had played no role to the development of Hindu Religion.

COULD THE FOUR VEDAS CONTRIBUTE TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF HINDU RELIGION ?

The answer to the above question is negative. The Aryan Vedas were transmitted through oral tradition. "Also bibliographical evidences indicate that the Vedas were written in Grantha and Nagari scripts, and according to tradition Veda Vyasa, a Dravidian, compiled and gave written form to the Vedas. The Grantha script belongs to the southern group of scripts and Veda Vyasa being a Dravidian would certainly have used it. Since the earliest evidence for Grantha is only in the 5th c AD, the Vedas were compiled and given written rather late".¹

(1. Alexandar Harris, Christianity and the Origin of Sanskrit, Paper presented at the I International Conference on the History of Early Christianity in India, New York, Aug. 2005, pp.5-6.)

It is more significant that the Vedas have no relevance in the religion of the Hindus, namely Saivism and Vaishnavism. Let us scrutinize the following elements to have a radical understanding.

ARYAN VEDAS VS HINDU RELIGION

Aryan Vedas	Hindu Religion
❖ Vedism is Workshop	❖ It is religion
❖ No temple workshop	❖ Prominently Temple Worship
❖ No idols	❖ Idol Worship
❖ Polytheism, Kenotheism	❖ Monotheism
❖ Against Linga Worship	❖ Linga Worship
❖ Opposed to Agamas	❖ Based on Agamas
❖ Basically Fire Worship	❖ Opposed to Fire Worship
❖ No trace of Trinity	❖ Based on Triune God
❖ Absence of Avatar doctrine	❖ Based on Avatar doctrine
❖ Sacrificial Worship (Karma Kanda)	❖ Fulfillment of Sacrifice (Jnana Kanda)

SIGNIFICANCE OF SANSKRIT

The first epigraphical evidence of Sanskrit is seen only in 150 AD and the neglect of Sanskrit by Ashoka, if the language was in use, would be contrary to his practice since his inscriptions are even in Greek and Aramaic apart from Prakrit. Vedas, Upanishads, Brahma Sutras, Gita etc. are in Sanskrit and hence they could not have been written prior to the 2nd c AD. We can witness the Christian influence on all these Sanskrit literature since they were all written after 2nd c AD.

THE ADVENT OF APOSTLE THOMAS IN INDIA

There is firm evidence for the advent of Apostle Thomas in North India in 49 AD in the Kingdom of Gondapharus and his arrival at South India in 52 AD at Kodungalur in the Malabar Coast. He planted 7 ½ Churches in Tamil Nadu and the half Church that he constructed at Thiruvithancode in Kanyakumari district is declared to be the existing oldest Church structure in the World.

St. Thomas' mission in India spanning from 49 AD till his martyrdom in 72 AD at Mylapore had a great impact on Indian religious scenario. Scholars have attested that his mission had a great impact on Buddhism also resulting in the birth of Mahayana, the great Vehicle.

THIRUKKURAL - ACLAIMED TO BE THE COMMON UNIVERSAL SCRIPTURE

The first Indian literary work in Tamil, 1st c AD. which invokes the Triune God.

- | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 st Chapter | - Kadavul Vaazhthu | - Invocation of God the Father |
| 2 nd Chapter | - Vaan Sirappu | - Invocation of God the Holy Spirit |
| 3 rd Chapter | - Neethaar Perumai | - Invocation of God the Son |

Many scholars claim Thiruvalluvar, the author of Thirukkural as a contemporary of Apostle Thomas.

BIRTH OF BHAKTI MOVEMENT

Thirukkural had catalysed the birth of Tamil Bhakti movement in the 6th c AD.

Saivite Saints (Nayanars) - Panniru Thirumurai,
Vaishnavita Saints (Azhvars) - Nalayira Thivya Prabhandam

EMERGENCE OF SAIVISM AND VAISHNAVISM

Saivism and Vaishnavism developed in the 7th c AD. These two religions are popularly known as Hindu Religion. The six fold religion viz. Saivism, Vaishnavism, Saktam, Ganapatyam, Gaumaram and Sauram are grouped under two major denominations known as Saivism and Vaishnavism.

HINDU RELIGION

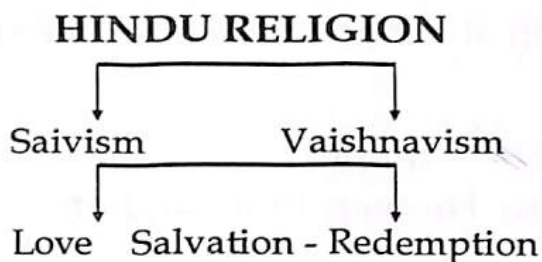
SAIVISM (Worship of Siva)	VAISHNAVISM (Worship of Vishnu)
Saktam (Worship of Sakti) Ganapatyam (Worship of Ganapathi) Gaumaram (Worship of Murugan)	Sauram (Worship of Ayyappan in the form of Light)

FUNDAMENTAL DOCTRINES OF HINDU RELIGION & CHRISTIANITY

HINDU RELIGION	CHRISTIANITY
Doctrine of Trimurthi	Doctrine of Trinity
Monotheism	Monotheism
Doctrine of Avatar	Doctrine of Incarnation
Fulfillment of Sacrifice {Palipeedam (Sacrificial altar sans sacrifice)}	Fulfillment of Sacrifice (Supreme Sacrifice of Jesus Christ)
Forgiveness of Sins	Forgiveness of Sins
Saranagati (complete surrender)	Salvation by faith
Doctrine of Eternity (Eternal Life/Death)	Doctrine of Eternity (Eternal Life / Death)

HOW HINDU RELIGION WAS CORRUPTED ?

1) Caste system - Introduced as law



HINDUISM / HINDUTVA

Social Inequality, Hatred & Injustice

Manu Dharma - 7 c AD @ Mt Abu

Varnashrama - Caste System codified

ARYANS

Brahmins - Religion, Education

Kshatriyas - Ruling, Administration

Vaisyas - Commerce, Agriculture

DRAVIDIANS

Sudras - Slaves

Panchamas - Outcasts

HINDU RELIGION UNIFIED THE INDIANS WITH HUMANE LOVE

HINDUISM DIVIDED THE INDIANS IN THE NAME OF CASTES

2) Religion was captured

- Brahmin priests initiated
- Temple entry restricted

- c) Temples desecrated
 - i) Temple prostitution
 - ii) Pornographic sculptures

3) Education denied to the sons of the soil
Sudras and outcastes not allowed to read the scriptures

4) Source materials destroyed

- 5) Scriptures
- (i) misinterpreted
 - (ii) distorted / mutilated
 - (iii) interpolated

Commentators : Adi Sankara, Ramanuja, Madhva - Brahmin
Sanskrit commentators for the Dravidian Prasthanas.

EVANGELISING THE HINDUS

Jesus is the answer - He is the Lord of history ; descended as an Avatar, offered himself as a Supreme Sacrifice ; ascended into heaven and lives even today.

PROPAGATE

DISCOURAGE

1. One God - Polytheisms, Minor god worship, Monism, Nature worship, idol worship etc.,
2. Triune God - Not three different gods.
3. Immoral character of the deities should be mentioned. Rama and Krishna are only Puranic and not historic Characters. According to their writings they are mortals. These human heroes were deified and elevated to the plane of godhead. The Avatar doctrine was superimposed on the heroic worship and thus incorporated into Vishnu Worship.
4. Correct interpretation of the doctrine of Avatar should be explained (**for further details go through the article : Doctrine of Avatar and Vyuhā**).

Ava + tar - Avatar = The process of coming down :

It is not going up, i.e., not elevating the human beings to the plane of godhead.

5. Do not blend mythology with religion.
6. Discourage Caste system at all levels.
7. Refute the theory of cycle of birth or rebirth. They are the beliefs of the atheistic religions like Buddhism & Jainism and they have no role to play in the theistic religions of Saivism and Vaishnavism.
8. Karma theory is the brain child of atheistic religion. Aryans have blended rebirth, and karma theories with Hindu religion to enslave them.
9. Yoga is not considered as a system of philosophy. It is only the physical exercise and not a spiritual entity.
10. Discourage idolatory. Idols have no life and they need the help of human beings for their mobility. The Brahmin priests alone have the right to enter the sanctum to perform pujas etc. and the devotees are branded as low castes.
11. What kind of assurance they have to overcome sin ?
12. Correlate Christian teachings and doctrines with Hindu religion, without equating Christ with any other gods. Jesus alone had died for our sins and no other gods. Magnify Jesus Christ and his life. He is sinless, loving, caring and peaceable with everybody. Do not boast about the religion.

DOCTRINE OF AVATAR AND VYUHA

INTRODUCTION :

The dual phenomena of divinity and humanity form the corner stone of the doctrine of Avatar. 'An infinite transcendent reality much greater than anything we can think or say that we can consider the possibility that God is literally such as to be able, without ceasing to be God, to make himself known in human form'. Though the Sanskrit term 'avatar' does not convey this in full sense, scholars evince keen interest to draw analogical line with the doctrine of incarnation.

The prefix 'ava' means 'down' and the verb 'tar' means the 'process of coming down' and the literal meaning of incarnation is 'to be made flesh' or 'enfleshment'. It is argued that unlike the Christological conception of incarnation, the avatar conception of Hindu legends and mythological propositions have outgrown the theological dogmatics.

Strictly speaking, 'divyam janma' (Gita) is the basis of avatar' and the doctrine of avatar is the humanization of the Supreme God and not the divinization of man elevated to the plane of Supreme deity. Radhakrishnan also emphasizes that 'An Avatar is a descent of God into man, and not an ascent of man into God'¹. But he seems to dilute the concept of descent when he writes that, "The human being is as good as an avatar provided he crosses the maya of the world and transcends his imperfection"². The tendency to over divinization and over deification of a human being downgrades the real dogmatic aspects of avatarin. However, it is historically true that deification of the extraordinary human beings was the outcome of Vyuha concept with special reference to Vrsni heroes of the family of Vasudeva.

VYUHA

Vyuha means part, manifestation, form etc., The original terminology is an expression of the arrangement or the formation of

the soldiers in the warfare but the Bhagavata religion and later Vaishnavism developed the doctrine of Vyuhās. It is also true that the Vyūha theory formed the principal tenet of the Pancharatra system. Vasudeva with his Vyūhas became a prominent deity of Pancharatrikas. Vasudeva, Samkarshana, Anirudha and Pradyumna are the four popular heroes of the Vrsni family who form the Vyūha theory. It seems that the independent cults of these Vyūhas later on merged into that of Vasudeva.

ASCENT ASPECT IN THE BACKGROUND OF WORLD RELIGIONS

The co-existence of humanity and divinity in an extraordinary manner is the major expression of the concept of avatar in general and the concept of Vyūha in particular. Some scholars point out that it is an expression prevalent in the world religions.

Ishanand Vempeny has coined a terminology 'Theanthropos', to express the above concept, " 'Theanthropos' combining the Greek words Theos (God) and anthropos (man), 'Theanthropoi' will be used for the plural"³. He further states that "In the secondary sense this term, Theanthropos' will be used meaning those persons in whom divinity is made manifest due to certain spiritual endowments or professions like a specially anointed prophet in Judaism"⁴.

In Mahayana Buddhism, the worship and veneration accorded to the Lord Buddha and Bodhisattvas are the expressions of Theanthropos cult. The worship of Tirtankara in Jainism and the worship of Gurus in Sikhism also fall in line with the above cult. The Confucianists, the Taoists and the Shintoists were also the king worshippers. In Zoroastrianism, Khwarenah, which would mean 'light', 'lustra', et., was an object of worship and this light made the kings of Kavi dynasty semi-divine. Ishanand points out that there are instances of theanthropoi in Islam, though it is anti-incarnational, among the Shiites, the concept of the Imans has much in common with the Buddhistic Bodhisattavas. "Mohammed is emphatically proclaimed as only a prophet of Allah, still popular piety renders him theanthropic worship"⁵.

As we know, in the realm of the doctrinal aspect of avatar, the descent aspect of the Ultimate Reality has a negligible role to play in the Indian context. The religious reformers/founders, sadhus, gurus, the kings and the heroes who had exhibited extraordinary or miraculous deeds, the political leaders etc., were deified as avatars. Numerous temples have been built for Narayana Guru of Kerala; The cinema matinee MG Ramachandran, N.T.Rama Rao, Kushboo are venerated and their admirers had built temples for them in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.

Mahabharata and the Puranic literary works very frequently emphasize the divinity of the Kings Vishnu is depicted as very closely associated with the King. Mahabharata makes no distinction between the kings and gods – ‘devascha nara devaska, tulya’ (Mah.v.140). God reigns the universe and all animate and inanimate things are under the control of God; Likewise the king is the ruler of his country and the ruling power was bestowed upon the king by God and certain kings were regarded by his subjects as God’s choice or his representative. The kings were addressed by their subjects as ‘deva’. It is evidenced by the numismatic inscriptions of certain kings – the issuance of gold coins of Chandragupta II bear the title of ‘Deva-Sri Maharajathiraja Sri Chandragupta’. Scholars opine that it is an indication of the desire of the kings to be elevated to the plane of divinity. The divinization of the kings was attested by the poets, the authors of the folk lore, Puranas and various artists.

Tolkappiyam refers to the aspect of an individual being worshipped as ‘Puvai Nilai’ (Tol.Porul, Purathinaiyal, 60). The heroes who were killed in action in the war were also venerated by people by way of planting of the hero-stones-‘Nadu Kal’. Hundreds of thousand of hero-stones were found in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka; We have literary evidence to ‘Nadu Kal’ in Sangam Poetry.

King worship was a prominent characteristic feature of the ‘ascent aspect’ which was prevalent throughout the world in the early histories. We have evidences of kingworship in the Roman history. The impact of king-worship is much to be seen in the Hindu Puranic

tradition. The worship of Vasudeva, Rama, Krishna etc., fall in this line and it is one thing to say that the Puranic literature gives free rein to imagination and emotionalism without bothering about scientific probabilities or historic accuracy. It is obvious in Mahabharata, Harivamsa, Bhagavata Puana, Vishnu Purana and other Puranas. King-worship is echoed in Nalayira-Thiviyap Prabhandam in the worship of Thirumal.

“Thiruvudai Mannaraik Kaanin Thirumalaik Kandene”⁶ is a popular line of adoration accorded to Thirumal;

CONCEPT OF VYUHA

It is already mentioned that Vyuha means part, manifestation, form etc., It is also termed as the grouped form of Tirumal. The grouped form of Tirumal is four fold viz.

Vasudeva, Samkarasana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha.

It is observed that Paripatal clearly mentions all four Vyuhās of Tirumal in Tamil words. Cenkan Kaari Karunkan Vellai Ponkan paccai painkan maal⁷.

In the text Kaari. Vellai, Paccai and Maal respectively denote Vasudeva, Samkarsana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha. The colours of these four Vyuha forms are described by the attributive words that precede these names.

Geoffrey Parrinder writes, “Ramanuja justified the Bhagavata devotees of Vishnu in their teaching that the highest Brahman divides itself into aspects or hypostases, such as ‘subtle’ (Sukshma), the ‘division’ (Vyuha), and the manifestation (Vibhava). These terms recall the Buddhist doctrine of Trikaya, or three forms of Buddha”⁸. The Bhagavata cult had evolved the theory of Vyuha which had included Vasudeva, Samkarsana, Vrisni heros, the family members of Krsna.

CULT OF VASUDEVA

The deification of the Vrsni heroes including Vasudeva plays the key role in the development of early Vaishnavism, strictly speaking. This development has to be excluded from the doctrinal aspects of Vaishnavism. The Vasudeva cult was originally a heroworship and was later, in the Christian era, merged with Vaishnavism. Vasudeva cult was prevalent as early as in the 4th Century BC., as Megasthenes refers to Heracles, i.e., Vasudeva was revered and venerated by the people of Souraseni, i.e., Mathura. The historic evidence for the ancient worship of Bhagavata cult is found in Madhya Pradesh.

The Garuda Stupa found in Besnagar is regarded as an important evidence of Bhagavata worship and this Garuda Stupa was installed by the Greek Ambassador Hecataeus who lived in Taxila. In the Besnagar Garuda pillar inscription, Vasudeva was venerated as 'deva deva'⁹.

Some scholars have pointed out that there were two persons with the same nomenclature, Vasudeva; Vasudeva of Vishnu Purana and Vasudeva and the son of Devaki Vasudeva Krishna were different persons.¹⁰

Mahabharata speaks about Vasudeva, the real personality and the bogus one. The worship of Krishna Vasudeva exemplifies the aspects of non-Vedic tenets.

In Bhagavad Gita, in Vibhūtiyoga Chapter, Krishna says, "Vrsninam Vasudevo asmi" and Krishna is identified with Vishnu-Adityanam aham Vishnuh"¹¹. Hence the Vasudeva cult the original hero-worship, was merged with Vaishnavism in the era of Christ when the doctrine of incarnation came into being and the Vrsni heroes were divinized through the theory of Vyuhā. Susmita Pande writes,

"When Krishna was declared as an incarnation, the followers of the other Vrsni heroes perhaps evolved the

doctrine of Vyuha according to which they were regarded as the emanations of the Lord and as phases of the manifestation of the spirit. The Vyuha doctrine was an effort to integrate the doctrine of incarnation and hero worship"¹².

The Vasudeva worship was merged with Narayana and Vishnu and the scholars very often exclaim that they are lacking evidence to show when this amalgamation took place.

Roy Chowdhury has asserted that the Bhramins only had merged the worship of Vasudeva with Vishnu mainly to attack Buddhism. He writes that the name Narayana Vishnu is not to be seen in any of the documents of the early Bhagavata cult.¹³

Krshna also was deified and regarded as the 'personal absolute'. The earliest Puranic texts speak of Krsna's father as 'Vasudeva'¹⁴ from which then Vasudeva, the 'son of Vasudeva is derived as a name of Krshna. According to Gonda, Krshna was identified with a god Vasudeva already worshipped in 2C.BC. Later in Bhagavad Gita Krshna is identified with Vishnu¹⁵. Therefore F.Hardy opines that 'The father's name as found in the Puranas would then be artificial 'reconstruction'.¹⁶ He further remarks that 'the process of Krshna's apotheosis took must be mentioned here, viz., his identification with Narayana on the one hand, a rsi-pair Nara/Narayana appears in the Mahabharata as the connecting link, or an alternative correspondence, with Indra/Vishnu or Arjuna / Krshna. On the other hand, Narayana alone appears to have some obscure independent origin, and at a later state he entered the Pancaratra and other branches of Vaishnavism as personal absolute. In whatever way this very complex development may have taken place, for most of the period under discussion in the main part of this study, Krshna is synonymous with Vasudeva, Vishnu, Narayana, Bhagavan, all names which denote the 'personal absolute'.¹⁷

The Narayaniya Section of Mahabharata describes the worshippers of Narayana Vasudeva Vishnu as Satvatas, Bhagavatas,

Pancaratra and Ekantins. The early records of the 1st and 2nd c. B.C. show that the worship of Samkarsana and Vasudeva was known as Bhagavata. This worship was prevalent in North Mathura region along with other Vrsni heroes. In the ensuing passages a brief sketch of the worship of the Vrsni heroes is examined.

VRNSI HEROES

The first century AD inscription near Mora is attested by the scholars which mentions about the five heroes of the Vrsni family, viz., Samkarsana, Vasudeva, Pradyumna, Samba and Ariruddha. Jitendranath Bannerjea also mentions these heroes on the authority of the Vayu Purana. The early sculpture of Balarama (Samkarsana) comes from Madura which has been assigned to the 2nd c. B.C. In Mahabharata he appears as the son of Vasudeva and Rohini. 'The worship of Samkarsana reveals many aspects of the Naga-worship. Vogel opines that the puranic nature of Baladeva should have been developed from the worship of Naga deva which later on was merged with the worship of Krshna.'¹⁸

The inscriptional and literary sources reveal equal significance for Vasudeva and Samkarsana. It is evident from the compound words - 'Samkarsana Vasudevapyam' The first century B.C. inscription treat Samkarsana with Vasudeva and it venerates them as 'Bhagavat' and 'Sarveswara'.¹⁹ A passage in Mahabharata tells that Samkarsana is the avatar of the white hair and Vasudeva the avatar of the black hair of Vishnu. Few stories describe Samkarsana as the annihilator of the Brahmins. He was also considered to be an object of worship which was deep rooted in the northern provinces of Mathura. There were temples for Samkarsana in the first two centuries in BC and it has been attested by Patanjali's Mahabhasya. The ancient Tamil Sangam poetry also give evidence to the worship of Baladeva. Silappathikaram also records that temples for Baladeva was available at Madurai and Kaverippoompattinam.²⁰ But as the amalgamated worship of Krshna - Vasudeva gathered momentum beginning from the Christ era, the worship of Samkarsana began to fade away. Later on the iconographic sources describe Samkarsana's idols either as the form of Vibhava or Vyuha.²¹

Pradyumna is the son of Krshna and Rukmini. In the Vyuha doctrine it is said that through Samkarsana is produced Pradyumna or Manas. From Pradyumna is created Aniruddha or akankara. Pradyumna and Aniruddha were not very prominent as Vasudeva and Samkasana. "The non mention of Pradyumna and Aniruddha in the Ghosundi and Nanaghat inscriptions leads D.C. Sincar to suggest that they were probably not as great religious teachers as were Vasudeva and Samkarsana and their worship must have been limited to Vrsni circle only in Mathura region."²²

Pradyumna is described as the Indian Eros or the Kamadeva by certain authors. Thus the worship of the Vrsni heroes was very much popular in the early centuries of the Christ era. But it was in the Gupta period an intense bhakti of Vasudeva was seen mostly. He was regarded as the incarnation of Vishnu. The avatar aspect of God was much appealing to the hearts of the common people and the Vrsni heroes' worship yielded place to different avatars of Vishnu. Apparently the hero worship of the Bhagavata cult had given rise to the apotheosis of the human beings to the plane of gods and thus it became inevitable to develop philosophic conceptions to the Pancaratra worship. It was evolved by keeping in tune with the idea of bhakti.

PHILOSOPHY OF VYUHA

The Vyuha is explained in Narayaniya section which is supposed to be the first source to tell this aspect²³. Accordingly to Grierson, Narayaniya section was written in the later period of Kushans, between 2nd and 4th c. AD.²⁴

The philosophy of Vyuha is explained in Pancaratra and the fundamental teaching of Pancaratra reaches upto a level of thought which very much emphasises the path of integralism, with regard to the nature of Brahman (Vasudeva - Narayana - Vishnu) as five - fold. He can be attained only through complete surrender to Him. Bhagavad Gita has been considered as a Pancaratra manuel taught by Sri Krshna. According to K.C. Varadachari, "Pancaratra agama is said to be an authority for Visistadvaita by Yamuna-carya in his Agama Pramanya."²⁵

He further states that Pancaratra is non-vedic and .

"Vedanta Desika quoted Vyasa as saying that" idam mahopanisadam catur-vedasamanvitam samkhyam-yoga-krtantena pancaratranu sabditam (saisvara mammas)

Again Pancaratra is deemed to be the source of Veda.

Mahato veda Vrksaya mulabhuto mahan ayam or vice versa.

Srutimulam idam tantram pramana kalpa - sutravat :
and as an alternative

Alabhe veda mantranam pancaratraditena va

All these quotations show that Pancaratra was considered to be an equal pramana to the sruti even by the author of Mahabharata."²⁶

One of the oldest sources of Pancaratra is said to be Ahirbuthnya Samhita. It would have been developed, according to Schrader, in 4th or 5th c. A.D. It described about the highest person who has the qualities of jnanabala, aisvarya, virya, tejas and sakti. He is the creator of the whole universe and He is the material cause of the universe. It shows His Virya, His Spontaneity of activity is called aisvarya, His power (sakthi) manifests in His creative power of the universe, and He is unfatigued in creation hence His Strength (bala). He is self - sufficient (tejas) and lacks nothing and by virtue of it He creates everything. These are the qualities of His knowledge (Jnana).

DIFFERENT MANIFESTATIONS OF THE LORD

'Para', 'Vyuha', 'Vibhava', 'antaryami' and 'arca' forms are the five-fold manifestations of the Lord. The highest form of the Lord in the highest heaven is 'para'. The six gunas, discussed above, in their totality make up the body of Vasudeva and his consort Lakshmi.

According to Ahirbudhnya Samhita, the gunas, 'Jnana' and 'bala', combine and Samkarsana becomes manifest, and 'sakthi' and 'tejas' combine and Aniruddha becomes manifest, 'aisvarya' and 'virya' combine and Pradyumna becomes manifest.²⁷

Susmita Pandey points out quoting Lakshmi Tantra, the function of Aniruddha is creating, of Pradyumna preserving and Samkarsane destroying while according to Visvaksena Samhita... Pradyumna creates, Ariruddha preserves and Samkarsana destroys.²⁸

God manifests Himself in four forms (Vyuhās) each with a distinctive function of creation, sustention and destruction, and transcendence. He himself manifests or descends as the avatar to establish righteousness and iron out unrighteousness, and the very purpose of the avatar is to save His devotees and the good from destruction and to destroy the wicked. He also manifests or descends as the self in the heart of all those who seek as their Inner Ruler and finally He is capable of descending into icons to facilitate His devotees so as to offer services (Karma or Kainkarya) to God to worship Him with love and bhakti.

It is said that each Vyūha is Vishnu himself with his six gunas of which only two in each case become manifest. Susmita Pandey tries to bridge the Vyūha concept with that of the doctrine of Trinity of Christianity. She writes,

"The Vyūhas may be understood on the analogy of the early Christian doctrine of the Trinity. The four Vyūhas are the four 'persons' or hypostasis with the same divine nature. They mutually reflect each other spontaneously and are indistinguishable as the sky and are indistinguishable as the sky and the crystal or the interpenetration of radiations."²⁹

But it is to be noted that the Vyūha concept does not amply fit into the Christian doctrine of Trinity as such.

CONCLUSION :

Strictly speaking the doctrine of incarnation or avatar is one hundred percent divine and one hundred percent human put together one hundred percent divine and human. It is a doctrine which exemplifies the humanization of divine and not the divinisation of human.

The avatar is historical and not mythical, if it is mythical, it is an attempt to exemplify the doctrine of avatarhood in the line of a parable or allegory. The puranic expositions have very much diluted the doctrinal aspect of avatarhood wherein miscellaneous elements have been fabricated which in turn had resulted in the unbecoming of the divine nature of the avatar himself.

When we examine the Puranas there is no consistency in the number of avatars of Vishnu. The Ahirbudhnya Samhita, for instance, enumerates thirty nine avatars,³⁰ whereas the Narayaniya section of Mahabharata gives two lists, in the first list, six avatars³¹ and in the second list only four avatars³² are mentioned. After a process of permutation and combination it is very widely accepted as ten avatars or Dasavatara. The poem which enumerates ten avatars in Mahabharata³³ according to the scholars, is an interpolation and they consider the second list to be the original one. The Bagavata Purana enumerates twenty four avatars and Pancaratra twenty nine. The successful inclusion of the Buddha in the list of Dasavatara has resulted in the elimination of Buddhism as a major religion from the Indian soil. Some scholars also have pointed out that an attempt was made to include Jesus Christ as one of the avatars of Vishnu and this attempt had been defeated³⁴.

Ever since the doctrine of incarnation was introduced in India, the process of deification of Rsis, Siddhus, religious and political leaders, matini idols etc. continue to go on. The concept of 'amsavatara' had played a vital role in apotheosizing the above people into the realm of avatars. Certain avatars are conveniently regarded as 'partial avatars', who cannot be worshipped for the purpose of ultimate liberation. This view has been expressed by K.C. Varadachari, who writes,

"There are indeed several versions of the manner how the avatar or descents of God happen; there are partial manifestations or just possessinal descents or full descents.

Some of them are descents permanently during the period of creative manifestation just as the lords of months; some

are descents from the Vyuhās, the gods are all amsavatars. The most well known avatars, namely, the ten reckoned, are all capable of being worshipped, whereas the partial avatars are not to be worshipped for the purpose of ultimate liberation. Inspired avatars are only those who belong to this category."³⁵

The descent aspect of God as a human being above is considered as incarnation or avatar. But the Puranas and Itikāsas of India evidencedly prove that the ascension of the human beings blended with imaginary and supernatural elements to the level of godhead are not really the incarnation of God. Which, in fact, amount to blasphemy.

Vempeni in his book "Kṛṣṇa and Christ" writes, "In the context of various grades of avatara existing in popular beliefs and in the context of the prevalent theories about Vyuhās, Vibhūtiṣ, Amsavatars etc. It is quite tempting to say that every avatar is an ascent, utthanami".³⁶

The Vṛṣṇi heroes were also deified when Kṛṣṇa was declared as an avatar of Viṣṇu. The emergence of the Vyūha theory was an outcome of the effort to integrate the doctrine of incarnation. In the words of Susmita, "The doctrine undoubtedly arose out of the deification of the several Vṛṣṇi heroes (Viras) besides Vasudeva."

In the Gita Kṛṣṇa Says,

"Vṛṣṇinam Vasudevo aṣmi"³⁸ and Kṛṣṇa also identifies himself with Viṣṇu - "adityanam aham Viṣṇuḥ"³⁸

Susmita, after analyzing the development of iconography, in the subsequent pages of her book, 'Birth' of Bhakti in Indian Religions and Art', conclusively writes,

"We know that when Kṛṣṇa was declared as an incarnation, the followers of other Vṛṣṇi heroes must have evolved the doctrine of Vyuhās accordingly to which they were

regarded as the emanations of the Lord (the tradition of hero worship was prevalent since ancient times and the worship of Vrsni heroes in Mathura was in this tradition)".³⁹

As has been pointed out earlier the avatar doctrine was very much appealing to the hearts of the people and it was those who practiced hereoworship amalgamated it with avatar doctrine and thus a new concept was developed. Vyuha concept appears first in the Narayaniya section and the period in which it was evolved was 2c. AD.⁴⁰ But the epigraphic evidence of Sanskrit is only 2 cAD and its evolvment as a literary language will be staggered further to 4c AD or later. The same author points out that other mythological stories were fabricated later in the 'Para Harivamsa'⁴¹ which has contributed to other puramic rendering etc., and the interpolations to these were rampant.

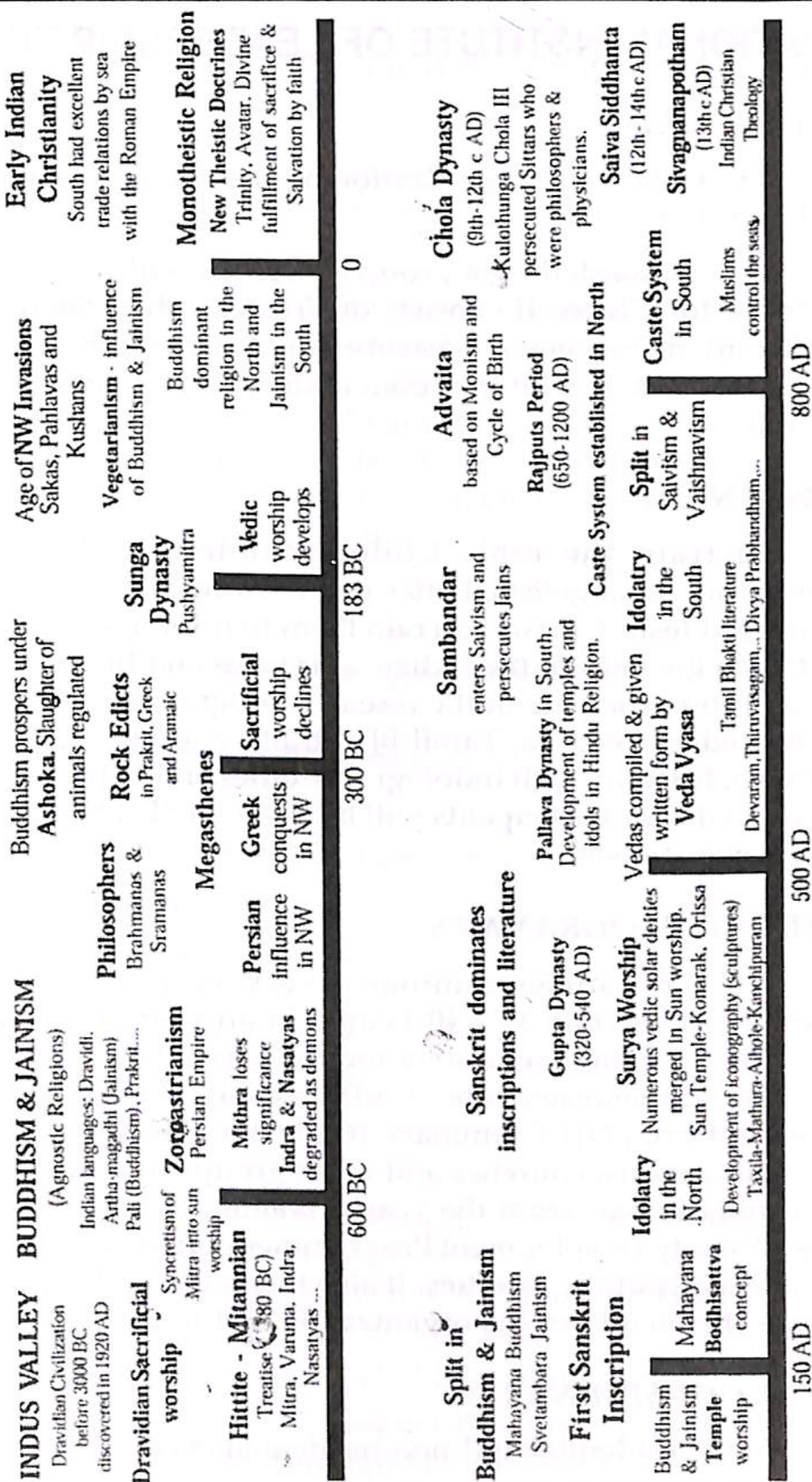
The doctrine of incarnation / avatar is non-vedic. Very many scholars have pointed out that the doctrine of incarnation / avatar was contributed by Christianity and the historical evidences also establish that this is found in India only in AD. The period of Ahirbudhnya Samhita which had contributed to the development of Pancaratra philosophy, according to Schrader, may be in 4th or 5th c. A.D. So the Vyuha philosophy appears to be an effort to integrate the family members of Krshna into the fold of the pantheon of avatars with a tint of the doctrine of incarnation and therefore the pantheon of heroes included in the Vyuha concept lack the credibility of the avatar doctrine, and the heroes of the Vrsni family etc. are evidently not the avatars.

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Historical Perspective of Worship and Religions in India



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